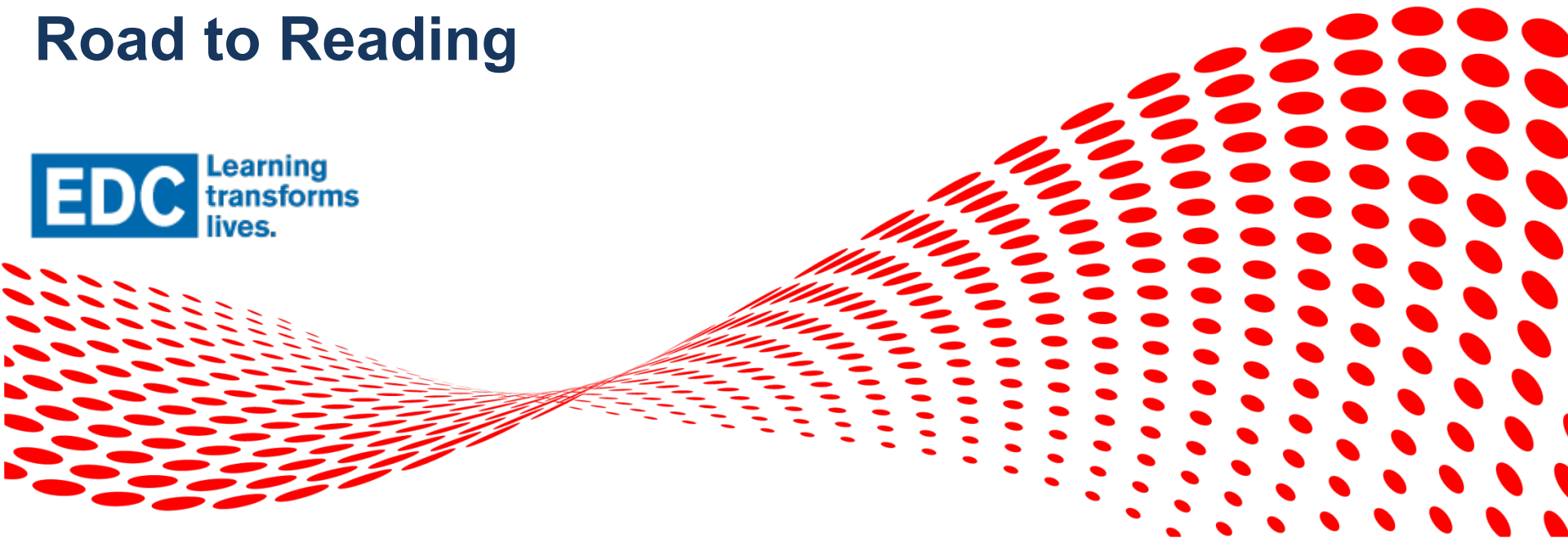# Why some students shouldn't learn about whales: Systemic quality imperatives and parent/teacher desires

DIARRA, Aude
HAÏDARA Youssouf M.
RHODES Rebecca

USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Road to Reading
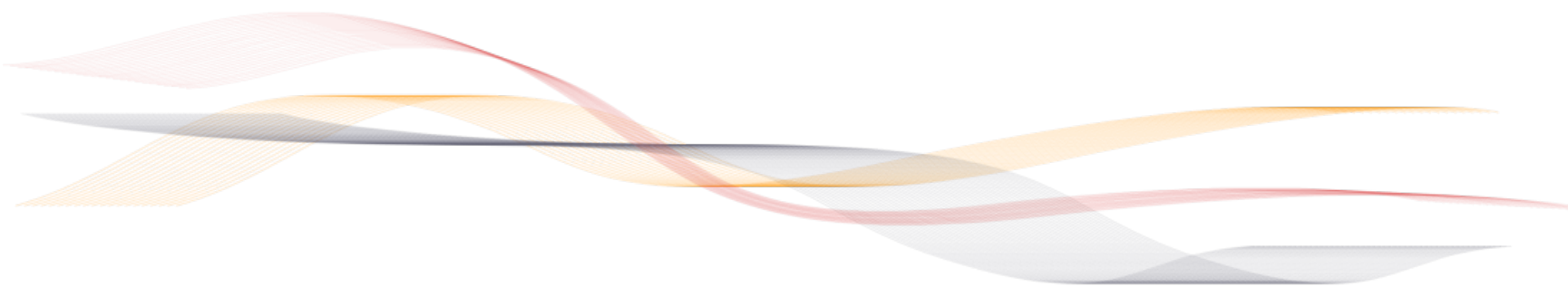
EDC Learning transforms lives.

Research questions

❖ What constitutes a quality education according to parents, learners, and teachers? How do these visions of quality align with paradigms retained in official documents?

❖ How does the official vision translate in the content of what is studied? Do the contents of learning reflect the visions of parents, learners and teachers?

❖ Do these dominant paradigms match learners' and parents' aspirations, hopes, and dreams?

❖ What is the link between these dominant visions and the place attributed to discovery and imagination?

❖ Does students' knowledge reflect the visions of the different actors?

Data

❖ 47 schools, 35 community schools and 12 medersas from the district of Bamako (Program suspension prevented us from collecting in other regions and in public schools)

❖ Open-ended questionnaires administered to parents, students and teachers individually as well as to focus groups

- ❑ 44 groups of parents, regardless of their children's grades (average group size: 19, range: [8;113]; 56% of mothers)

- ❑ 47 groups of grade 3 and 4 students (average group size: 15, range: [10;33]; 50% of girls)

- ❑ 78 grade 3 and 4 teachers among them 11 teachers of French in medersa schools

Aspirations and hopes (1)

❖ Parents wish that their children will study to the level of university and PHD. In ¼ of groups, differences between gender has been evoked

« Girls can stop studying when they can read and write »

"Girls can stop studying when they know Qu'ran »

« It depends on their husbands »

« Education is an opening. Girls would be tempted to act as occidental girls do .»

Aspirations and hopes (2)

❖ Parents wish that their children would learn to speak English, French, Arabic. Students want to learn to speak English, French, and Chinese

❑ French often is associated to school and learning to read

❑ Children give more importance to national languages than parents.

❑ Parents evoke travel more than jobs as reason to learn a language.

❖ Parents wish all children have a job (doctor, lawyer, teacher,…)

❑ Children prefer manual jobs (14%) more than their parents (3%)

❑ Children have more various aspirations (policeman, footballer, fashion designer, diamond miner)

❑ Parents think that school prepare students for the job market

Visions of the school's role in meeting these aspirations

School for...	Parents	Students	Teachers	Official
... a good future	1	1	2	
... knowledge	2	2	1	
... morality	3	5	4	
... the country	4	6	3	x
... Islam	5	3	Never	
... world knowledge	6	7	Never	x
... itself	7	4	Never	
... cultural identity	8	Never	Never	x
... autonomous thinking	9	8	Never	

Ranking of subjects' importance (1)

Area	Preferred by children	Most important according to	
		Parents	Teachers
Language Arts	51%	43%	50%
Math	19%	21%	19%
Sciences	3%	6%	4%
Social Science	15%	17%	22%
Arts, sport	4%	0%	2%
Jobs	0%	1%	0%
Islam	6%	11%	1%
Others	1%	1%	3%

❑ Importance attributed to different subjects is similar between actors

❑ What differs is the understanding of the particular content of a given subject. Children preferred areas that adults judged important but what they quote in each area is different from adults. *(They want to do history while parents and teachers preferred civic instruction and morality. Children and teachers want to do more grammar or IRI when parents focus on reading and writing and French)*

Ranking of subjects' importance (2)

❖ Students and parents like Islamic instruction and want to see it reinforced. No teacher speaks about it, even in medersas.

❖ Children do not cite disciplines to add. However, they suggest a range of topics/themes: snow, earthquakes, foreign food, how to pilot a plane…

❖ Comparatively few answers received on what subjects/content should be added to curricula. Why ?

   ❑ Children often say that they do not know anything else to add,

   ❑ Parents do not trust in their ability to decide what their children should learn,

   ❑ Teachers do not want make the program heavier or touch this « holy document »

Contents of learning in the curricula (1)

❖ Primary curricula focus on own culture and environment and on good citizenship , by promoting skills like:

❑ Managing his environment

❑ Being a good citizen (be aware of his duties and rights, respect rights of others, recognize road signs)

❑ Developing a patriotic mind (know and respect Country emblems, name some local personalities, some local celebration)

❑ Reconstituting his past (town founders, original districts …)

❑ Respecting social values

Contents of learning in the curricula (2)

❖ Grade 3/4 and 5/6 curricula are supposed to widen learning to the world, but it is only partially achieved. For example:

❑ Social science courses deal only with history and geology of the LOCAL REGION

❑ The skill named "spatial awareness" requires of children to know earth shape, the seas, and the climate

❑ In language arts, no themes of reading or writing are imposed to teachers. Books contents will guide reading contents.

Parents and teachers' opinions about imagination development and discovery (1)

	Parents		Teachers	
	Write	Read	Write	Read
Students should write/read **only** on themes close to their environment	57%	65%	84%	77%
Students should write/read **first** on themes close to them then on themes more distant	8%	0%	1%	3%
Students should write/read **only** on themes distant **from their environment**	8%	10%	1%	6%
Students should write/read **BOTH** on themes close **AND** distant from them	24%	20%	12%	14%
Others	2%	4%	1%	0%
Imagination should NOT be encouraged during RW activities	11%	24%	14%	22%

Parents and teachers' opinions about imagination development and discovery (2)

❖ Reading and writing themes should be focused on direct environment of students:

- ❑ It makes the task of RW easier for children and for them
- ❑ Students already knows their environment
- ❑ Students need to discover or better know their environment
- ❑ Students can express themselves more easily, actively, using their own experience
- ❑ Students' interest is stimulated

❖ Proportion of people thinking students can work on imaginary texts is higher for writing than for reading. Indeed, reading is a way to cram information in students heads, also it should be correct.

Parents and teachers' opinions about imagination development and discovery (3)

❖ Imagination is associated with unreal and lie, and is expected to lead to confusion between reality and fiction.

« Les choses imaginaires disent des choses qui ne sont pas toujours réelles ou vraies »

« Les élèves vont se rendre compte que l'enseignant ment»

« les enfants apprennent le mensonge, ils ne vivent pas dans la réalité »

"Si tu dis quelque chose et que cette chose n'arrive pas, tu vas mentir aux élèves"

« Les choses imaginaires peuvent désorienter les enfants »

❖ Teachers and parents sometimes add that anyway, students are not able to imagine.

Pedagogical practices to develop imagination and discovery - Examples

❑ Reading on various themes unrelated to children own experience

❑ Through images

❑ Asking children to create scenarios, to think farther

❑ Doing artistic activities

❑ Give only one or two words to create a story

❑ Imagine an object from a given form

❑ Linking Ideas

❑ Through problem solving

Pedagogical practices to develop imagination and discovery (1)

❖ Teachers have been asked to say during which activities they try to develop imagination of children

❑ A lot of them did not understand the question, giving name of global subjects like grammar, math. For example, one teacher said that he teaches a method to solve a mathematical problem and that students develop their imagination by applying the same method

❑ Less of one fifth of teachers mentioned a subject appropriate to develop imagination and only 3 teachers mentioned a specific activity during which students would use imagination

Pedagogical practices to develop imagination and discovery (2)

	Teachers	Students	Parents
Independent reading, reading for pleasure	27%	46%	
Independent writing	23%	12%	
Children able to write something personal	47%		40%

❑ 3/4 of teachers do not plan independent reading time. The majority says that they do not know what it is, some of them that they have no reading support or no time to do that.

❑ 3/4 of teachers do not plan independent writing sessions. The majority says that they do not know what it is or how to do that. Others say that children are not capable of writing.

❑ In classrooms, according to students, teachers and parents, writing is only equivalent to copy letters and lessons from the blackboard on students' notebooks.

Evidence of imagination and discovery lack of value (I)

❖ 10 sets of 3 reading support covers were presented. Students, parents, and teachers had to choose 1 among the 3, for each set.

❖ In each set, one cover is related to immediate environment, one to a wider environment, and the last one to another country, another culture or to imaginary things.
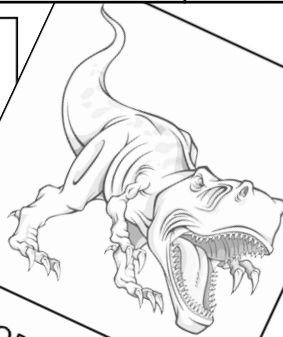
	Stud.	Teach.	Par.
Immediate environment	49%	50%	50%
Wider environment	29%	35%	33%
Unknown	22%	15%	17%

LES DOGONS ET LEURS MASQUES

LES BAMAKOISES ET LES BAZINS

LES MEXICAINS ET LEUR PONCHOS

L'ANE REVEUR

LE FIER LION

L'HORRIBLE TYREX

Evidence of imagination and discovery lack of value (2)

	Stud.	Teach.	Par.
Dog	46%	57%	57%
Camel	35%	30%	36%
Whale	19%	13%	7%
Dad's village	59%	66%	53%
Timbuktu	31%	33%	43%
Inuits' village	10%	2%	3%
My class	69%	79%	80%
My cousin's class	22%	16%	17%
Imaginary insects' class	8%	5%	3%
Marbles	17%	47%	25%
Kites	11%	21%	21%
Video games	71%	32%	54%
Mother	69%	52%	61%
Issa the tailor	25%	34%	36%
Man and Jackhammer	6%	14%	4%

	Stud.	Teach.	Par.
Donkey	40%	53%	67%
Lion	43%	38%	19%
Dinosaur T-Rex	17%	9%	15%
Newspaper	*14%*	*7%*	*7%*
Book	*63%*	*64%*	*64%*
Internet	*23%*	*29%*	*29%*
Donkey cart	30%	38%	36%
Train	27%	43%	25%
Space shuttle	43%	18%	39%
Cat	81%	64%	74%
Scorpio	11%	19%	11%
Monster	8%	17%	15%
Bazin textile	66%	40%	38%
Dogon men	23%	53%	59%
Mexican men	11%	6%	3%

❑ The curriculum doesn't encourage imagination and wider knowledge, so the children don't have the desire to know more or fear that this is the wrong thing to do

Implications on students' knowledge (1)

❖ Questions on national cultures and scientific concepts asked to children come from grade 1/2 curriculum content.

❑ **National cultures:** Preferred food of Soninke people, region where people play Balafon, Name of Mali's first president, name of Bamako founding families, languages spoken in Bandiagara

❑ **Scientific/mechanical concepts:** Power source of a radio, West side on a card, Diseases dues to vegetables not properly washed, uses of computer, uses of a saw

Questions	Comm.	Medersas	All
National cultures	46%	52%	48%
Scientific/Mechanical	65%	73%	67%

Implications on students' knowledge (2)

❖ Questions on world culture have been chosen to match questions on national cultures because grade 1/2 curriculum doesn't touch on world knowledge. Examples: Name two oceans, two continents, the country where Nelson Mandela comes from, the country where Lionel Messi comes from, the preferred food of Italian people

Questions	Comm.	Medersas	All
National cultures	46%	52%	48%
World cultures	18%	22%	19%
Scientific/Mechanical	65%	73%	67%

Name two continents	17%
Name two oceans	0%
Do Italians prefer to eat noodles, couscous, or french fries ?	28%
From which country is Lionel Messi ?	40%
From which country is Nelson Mandela ?	11%

How does this affect children's experience of school?

❖ **Children like their school, yes… for :**

- ❑ Instruction
- ❑ Teachers are serious
- ❑ Seriousness, discipline, hard work
- ❑ Learning about God (medersas)

They only use very adult, serious considerations, no affective words.

❖ **Children like their teacher too :** for his seriousness (1/5), because he is a good teacher (1/5), because he is nice, gentle, he loves them (1/5)

❖ **A violent environment :** 82% of children evoke violence as the main failure of school or teacher.

- ❑ 3/5 of children complain about physical violence then they complain of insults, thefts, and fights between students (1/4)

"He often hit us", "He humiliates us" , "He hit us too much when he is angry", "When he hit us, he wound us", "He uses whip when we do not understand".

- ❑ NO parents evokes violence when asked for teaching methods. Only 1

How does this affect children's experience of reading?

❖ Reading is very rarely evoked as a pleasurable experience, such as the way to discover events and places. It is most frequently evoked as a school activity, that should be done to succeed in school and because parents say that reading is important.

❖ 100% of children like to read !! But…

❑ School manuals…

❑ Less of 10% of them like or would like to read something not from school: (Cartoons, folk tales)

❑ 87% of children have books at home !! But school manuals

❖ Majority of children prefer to read than watch TV… because they can learn in books, because TV prevents them from learning, because books are important for the future.

How to succeed in promoting both national values and discovery-based learning (1)

The challenge: adapting contents and pedagogy so that positive aspects of national identity are promoted AND children have more opportunities to imagine and to explore the world

❖ Use the opportunities already available in the curriculum to provide children greater exposure to topics beyond the known (ex: in language arts)

❖ Review the curricula for all subjects to identify areas where a greater variety of topics and/or themes can be introduced

❖ Adapt pre-service and professional training for teachers to place a higher value on discovery-based and experiential learning

❖ Support parents and families in finding strategies to encourage reading at home

❖ Train teachers to use a pedagogical approach that includes:

❑ Activities based on imagination and discovery (independent reading, independent writing)

❑ Different techniques to encourage young children write different kinds of written production (ex : guided writing, writing pattern, daily journal)

❑ Engage children in discussions, questions, and thinking out of the box

❑ Read or tell stories from other cultures, other environment, imaginary tales

❖ Train teachers to enrich their classes environment with low cost locally produced materials (ex: students' production, cement sack posters)

❖ Mobilize the necessary resources to implement the policy of development of reading corners

Thank you!